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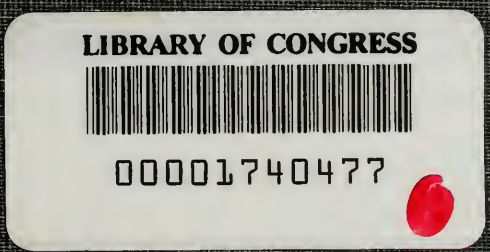

James G

MR. BIRNEY'S SECOND LETTER.

To the Ministers and Elders of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky:

Dear Brethren,—I have concluded to address to you a few remarks on the subject of slavery—one that has, for a long time, deeply interested my own heart, and on which I have bestowed very careful consideration. Were I to set you down as indifferent to it, I know it would be doing you great injustice. Indeed, so much do I count upon your *right desires* in relation to it, that, although I come clothed with no official authority in that branch of God's church to which we belong, yet do I presume that you will read, meditate upon, and with a just balance, weigh, any arguments that may be submitted to you in a christian spirit, come from what quarter they may.

It is not my intention, at this time, to take up the whole subject of slavery, and discuss it in its details, or to answer the multiplied *excuses* that have been made by christians and others, for the help they have brought for its continuance. I mean rather to present: 1. Some of the most prominent characteristics of slavery. 2. Some of the *excuses* of our church for not purifying herself from this sin, with answers to them: and 3. The consequences to the church and the state at large, if she should *at once* enter upon her duty. The characteristics to which I now ask your attention, are

1. It *originated*, has *always been*, and is *at this day*, maintained by a *violence* that is utterly at variance with the mild spirit of the gospel,

2. It wrests from *one set* of men, without crime on their part, the fruits of their bodily toils, for the support and ease of another.

3. Its effects upon its *subjects* are to stupify and benumb the mind, to vitiate the conscience, to multiply sins of the grossest character, to exclude the knowledge of God and Christ, as well as of the necessity of any preparation for the world to come; and, of course, to prepare them for hell.

4. Its effects upon those *who maintain it*, and in some measure upon those who witness and consent to it, are *indolence, diabolical passions, deadness to the claims of justice* and the calls of *mercy*, a *worldly spirit*, and *contempt for a large portion of our fellow creatures;* therefore, as far as their qualifications for an eternal state are modified by slavery, it rather prepares them for the sentence of the *damned*, than for the invitation of the *blessed.*

That the above are *some*, but by no means *all*, of the characteristics of slavery, no one, with our opportunities of witnessing the thing itself, will deny. Now, does it not seem passing strange, that a 'monster of such hideous mien' should have been received within the very midst of the church of God—that it should find in its bosom its surest and softest resting place—that it should be fondled, sleeked, and cherished there? and that if any one attempt to tear him from his lodgment, with one consent all cry out, '*let him alone! let him alone!—we have become so accustomed to his presence, that much of his deformity has been taken away, and we cannot do without him; we are preparing him for his discharge, which, as he is slow to learn, he will probably be ready for, in some hundred or two years:* THEN *he can be dismissed without injury to any one concerned; but don't disturb him* NOW; *he is very quiet, all things are going on well. Make what preparation you please for his* FUTURE *dismission, but by no means touch him at* THIS TIME. *The church! the* CHURCH! *you'll endanger the* CHURCH, *and make it more unpopular than it now is. I charge you, wait for a 'more convenient season.' God is opening the way for his discharge in his own good time. If you attempt it* NOW, *you will not only utterly fail, because all the* CHURCH *will be against you; and besides, they will call you, and join with those who are* WITHOUT *in calling you, a madman and a fanatic—and your influence will be destroyed.*' This is no caricature; it is solemn, serious truth; should it be denied, there are 'clouds of witnesses' to prove it. But to return. It would make this address too long, were I to notice exceptions which the scrupulous might raise; or stop to present modifications that I might, under other circumstances, think it desirable to make, of my positions; or to fortify myself carefully, as I proceed, with defences, as if I were contending with enemies. I shall not detain you to do so. I write not to cavillers, nor to such as are *determined* to remain unmoved by any thing that can be said; but to brethren beloved, as I trust, by our common Lord, who are willing to do whatever may hasten his glorious reign on earth, and add to their own eternal weight of glory in heaven.

If, then, slavery be characterized by *violence, oppression, injustice*—by tendencies to the ruin of the souls of both master and

slave—why should you hesitate to say *it ought to cease* AT ONCE? You reply, the Bible does not decisively condemn slavery. In support of this you say: 1. *Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, had servants*, or as you would render it, '*slaves*.' Now, admitting all that is asked in the case of Abraham, and that the word translated '*servants*' means '*slaves*,' it will be found to prove a great deal more than you desire. For if it be argued—because *he* had slaves, therefore *I* may have them, it will equally follow that prevarication, if not falsehood, and concubinage may be justified; for Abraham was guilty of both. But the word '*servants*,' I apprehend, means here, the *subjects* of Abraham, as a prince. The same word is used in reference to the courtiers of Saul, and to the most confidential part of the faithful little army that adhered to David during his persecutions by Saul. And in the 9th chapter of the first of Kings, it is used in exact contrast to 'bondmen.' Besides all this, in the same chapter in which the persons who constituted the army of Abraham are called his '*servants*,' the patriarch himself calls them '*young men*.' 2. *The Hebrews were directed to make slaves of the surrounding nations.* This is very true, when applied to the *seven* nations particularly mentioned in the 7th chapter of Deuteronomy, who, *for their sins*, had been devoted to destruction. But does it follow, because the people whom God had specially selected as the instrument to execute his judgments, and had, on this account, excepted from the great law of love *to the stranger*, that *we* are excepted from the obligation of this law? Every *exception* to a general law must be specially pleaded; and, according to the demands of common sense, clearly proved. To show the absurdity of this excuse: If the sheriff of Fayette county should execute a murderer, in pursuance of the sentence of death duly pronounced upon him, would this act, entirely justifiable, because directed by proper authority, furnish even an excusatory plea, much less one that would go to the entire justification of the sheriff of *another* county, for having put to death an innocent man, uncondemned by any form of law, merely for the gratification of his own malignant temper, or for the promotion of some selfish purpose? It is useless to give an answer to this statement.

3. *The Savior himself said nothing in condemnation of slavery, although it existed in great aggravation whilst he was upon earth.* He said nothing about it, and to my apprehension, for this very good reason, that he did not preach to the *Romans*, or to the people of any other country where slavery prevailed; but to the *Jews*, among whom the abolition principles of Moses' laws had already very nearly, if not entirely, extinguished it. On the same principle we may account for his silence concerning many practices that are condemned by the spirit of his gospel, such as gambling, gladiatorial and other cruel exhibitions, and offensive and ambitious wars, so common in his time, and carried to such enormity by the Romans and other Gentiles.

4. *But Paul and Peter establish, or recognize as established, the relation of master and servant, (slave,) when they give admonition to both as to their reciprocal behavior. It is very certain that this would not have been done, they being holy and inspired men, if the relation itself was sinful; or if there was any thing in the subjection of one human being to the will and caprice of another that was forbidden by God's law.* Now, if the word '*servant*' be used by Peter and Paul to mean '*slaves*' exclusively—a meaning I admit only that the excuse may have all the force it can claim—their exhortation to persons in this condition amounts to no more than what had been impressed before upon all who were, or might become, the victims of injustice or oppression, *to bear it patiently.* It was given with the same object and in the same spirit, as the command of the Savior himself, *that the persecuted should pray for their persecutors.* Had it been a common evil during the ministry of Paul and Peter, to which christians were exposed, to be cast into prison by the lawless power of individual persecutors, would the exhortations of these apostles to them to bear their sufferings with resignation and meekness, *establish*, or *recognize as established*, the relation of *persecutor and persecuted?* or authorize christians to exercise grievous oppressions upon one another, or upon such of the heathen as they might be able to circumvent and bring into their power? Or when Paul, through Titus, admonishes his brethren to be 'subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates,' does he in the slightest manner sanction the imperial atrocities of a Nero, a Domitian, or any of their legitimate successors until now? I know you will say, he does not; and that he would have condemned in the conduct of those tyrants towards their obscurest subjects whatever was inconsistent with the great and universally binding law, 'thou shalt do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.' If, then, Nero, for example, had submitted to the gospel that Paul proclaimed in his capital, and become an obedient disciple of the apostle—although he might have retained the *power and authority* of an emperor, yet his oppressions, his cruelties, would have ceased, the very temper that prompted them would have been suppressed, his power would have been put forth for *good*, not for *evil*, and he would have been seen a prince dispensing justice in mercy, and finding his own happiness in that which he daily scattered over a grateful people. Would he, *under Paul's discipline*, have seized upon the poor, the weak, the defenceless of his empire, that he might exact from them toil unrequited during their whole lives, and consign them and their innocent children after them to social and civil degradation in the midst of happy millions—to personal bondage, to mental darkness—to the power of vice and the dominion of sin—to hopelessness in this world—to shame and everlasting contempt in that which is to come? Or had the converting grace of God found him acting the bloody and relentless tyrant, and thus fulfilling his *relation* to the oppressed, would he, *Paul being his teacher*, have continued it during his life? And not content with this, would he—*calling upon Paul to indite his last will and testa-*

ment—have perpetuated by legacy to his issue this continually growing mass of blood and groans—of misery and tears.* But let us come down down from the tyrant over millions, to his miniature—brandishing the ensign of his authority over some half dozen of his fellow-creatures—and see how the matter stands. You insist that Paul recognized—that is, *acknowledged to be right*—the relation of master and servant among his cotemporaries, of course, that it could not have been wrong *then*, when tested by the great principles of man's duty to his fellow man, preached by him in his own time, and which we consider as preached to all persons *since*. The inference you would deduce from these premises—one which is unavoidable—is, that, as these principles can never change, as they were intended for the direction of men, in all time, (to say nothing of eternity,) this relation *then* right, must be so *now*. This I believe is a fair statement of the position assumed, on this passage, by the scriptural advocate for continued slavery. Admitting all the premises to be true, the conclusion to which you have come would be altogether undeniable; and we would be authorized now to inflict upon our fellow-men, white or black, who might be reduced into our power, all the enormities of Roman or Grecian slavery. But there is an essential part of your premises—*the approbation of Paul of the injustice and cruelty of the master*, covered up under the very comprehensive word, *relation*, that I apprehend is very far from being maintainable: For if it can be maintained, it must be by making him nullify all those principles of moral action which he had been unceasingly inculcating upon his fellow-men, and of which he had been giving in his own conduct a bright example. For if this *relation*, [in which are to be included all the atrocious powers conferred by the Roman laws in the time of Paul, as well as the powers, not

* The natural tendency of slavery is to the *second death*—of liberty, to *eternal life*, although there are exceptions in both—*slaves* frequently giving good evidence of piety, and men who are *free* abusing their freedom to their destruction. The slaveholder, then, is engaged in maintaining a system which leads to *death*, whilst God is maintaining one which leads to *life*. The slaveholder is conducting his five, ten, or twenty slaves down to the *pit*, whilst God is striving, as far as He thinks proper to influence rational mind, to raise them to *heaven*. What a reflection for the disciple of the merciful Savior! Let him not stop here, but make a calculation of the increase of his slaves for the next twenty, fifty, or hundred years, (it is too awful to proceed further,) taking for his basis the increase of the whole number of slaves in the United States for the last forty years, that he may see what multitudes he is, as far as we can tell, qualifying for perdition. The christian who holds slaves during his own life, and '*wills*' them to his children afterwards, is doing, according to my poor apprehension, *all that he can do* to defeat the benevolent purposes of God. (These '*wills*' will be bloody evidences at the judgment seat of Christ.) He sins himself, and produces suffering as long as God gives him the physical power—not satisfied with this, he fastens the habit of *suffering* on his slaves and their posterity, and the habit of *sinning* on his *own*. May there not be strong grounds to fear, that, as he has been chief in this world in the dread preparations for misery, he will be fearfully preeminent in the dread retributions of that which is to come? Can such an one dwell in the presence of a God of *mercy?* If he can, tell me I pray you, in what part of the Bible you find a warrant for your belief? I have not yet found it.

much less atrocious, exercised in some parts of our own country *now*? be *right;* it follows, consequentially, that to do any thing fairly necessary in the estimation of the *superior* in the relation, to maintain it, cannot be *wrong*. Thus, among the Romans, masters could put their slaves to death, at pleasure; and it was done with great cruelty and frequency: they kept their slaves chained to the door posts as janitors, they branded them in the forehead, and, if the master was slain at his own house and the murderer undiscovered, all his domestic slaves were liable to be put to death. *Under this power, four hundred were put to death on a single occasion.* Will you drive the apostle to a recognition of such horrible deeds? To an acknowledgment, that they were right? That there was in them no violation of the great *law of love*? No, you reply; this is *too horrible.* I rejoin, and say, that you cannot, then, on your own principle, charge him with the recognition of *any* violation, how small soever it may seem, of this law. For the same purpose, *(the maintenance of the relation,)* it may be thought necessary by masters among us, to keep back the hire of the laborers who reap down their fields, (this is injustice)—that, if a slave, in obedience to the very constitution of man's nature, when self-interest, the mainspring of action, is taken from him, become indolent—if he be reluctant to spend *gratuitously* for another that property which the great author of his being has given him in his own physical powers, in his own bones and muscles and sinews—he may be beaten and scourged to any extent, however cruel, till this indolence, this reluctance to an unrequited transfer of his labor to another, this natural tendency to self-indulgence, be overcome. (This is oppression.) To the same end, it may be necessary, in the opinion of the master, in order to derive that profit from the *relation* which only makes it worthy of being maintained, that marriages among his slaves be discouraged, and a gross state of concubinage permitted; that the wife be torn, at midnight, from the man of her love, and her screaming children wrung from her frantic grasp; that the husband find his manly arms, intended for the protection of his helpless offspring, bound in the weighty and sure fetters of the southern slaver; and the last, the sole atom of earthly happiness they were all enjoying, cast upon the winds. This is *cruelty unmixed*—and to justify it, you bring the noble-minded apostle, who suffered persecutions without number, distress and death, that he might bring men to *love* one another!!!

Further: it might be that the whole life of a master would be passed in the perpetration of *injustice*, the exercise of *cruelty* and *oppression;* that a relation might be perpetuated whose substance is the aliment of the most *overbearing despotism* on the one part, and the *vilest abjectness* on the other. If the sins that may be said to be inherent in *slavery;* if injustice, cruelty, and oppression, were habitually committed against persons *not in the relation*, and unrepented of, the perpetrator, by the judgment of all men, would be damned forever—if they were committed against our *white* 'neighbors,' a furnace hot as Nebuchadnezzar's would be too cool for

him. Yet, notwithstanding his character may, by the indulgence of the worst passions against his slaves, have become as mean, as vicious, as degraded, and as unfit for the society of the just made perfect, as if he had indulged them against free persons, and his equals in society—because, forsooth, his slaves are in the *relation*, there seems to be no harm done, and at his death he is taken up to heaven, where all this treatment of his slaves—they being in the *relation*, goes for nothing. Thus it would appear that Paul and Peter, after exhorting men to do all—even to their eating and drinking, for the glory of God—to be holy in all manner of conversation—are found supporting a *relation* whose sole object is, on the one side temporary convenience, at the expense of personal degradation on the other, and the moral pollution of both—whose universal tendencies upon the parties concerned, and upon society at large, have been mischievous, polluting, and unholy. To these apostles I do not think can fairly be attributed such miserable logic to support such miserable morals.

For further illustration: suppose that during the ministry of Paul, a christian slave at Colosse, thinking himself treated in an unchristian manner by his christian master, had brought his case before the church whilst Paul was on a visit to that city. He would allege against his master, that instead of giving him, as Paul had directed, what was just and equal for his services, he gave him nothing but his food and clothing, and these, in many instances, adjusted to his wants with the most scrupulous nicety; that his 'threatenings' were many, and his scourgings not a few. The master may be supposed to have admitted all the *facts* of the case, and to have justified himself in such words as these: 'As to the command to give my slave what is just and equal, I have never interpreted it to mean what the standard of justice among *equals* would require; but rather that I should give him *just* what suited my convenience: and as to giving him what is *equal*, or, as he understands it, *a fair equivalent* for his services, it never once entered my head—for I might as well have no slave at all as to do this; indeed, he would, if this be the meaning of it, soon be as free as I am. And as to the threatenings and scourgings that I have bestowed upon him, his own insolent claims, now reiterated—have justly provoked them. They are absolutely necessary to keep him humble and obedient, make him know his *place*, and to perpetuate the *relation* which you yourself have recognized, and know, ought by all means to be maintained.' What now do you think Paul would have done, after hearing such an harangue as this? Would he have sent for the Phrygian *slave code*, have collated the laws, and heard testimony as to all the recognized and approved customs of oppression? Or would he have taken up the word of God, the perfect law of liberty, and quoted to him, '*in all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them?*' Brethren, if such a case should be brought before you, how would you decide? By the laws and customs of slavery as they exist in Kentucky, or by the *book of God*? If by the latter, what becomes of slavery? It is shivered to atoms.

In the most *flourishing* period of Greece, women held a very degraded rank; they were considered rather as the slaves than the companions of man. There is no proof that in the time of the apostle, during her declension, their condition was in any manner ameliorated. Among the Romans, it was permitted to men to divorce their wives at pleasure, with, or without cause.

By the Roman laws, absolute power over the child was given to the parent, even to the selling of him into slavery, or to the taking away of his life. Power almost as unlimited was given to the creditor over his insolvent debtor. If any one was indebted to several persons, and could not find a cautioner, (security,) his body, according to some, might be cut to pieces and divided among his creditors.

Now, christianity recognizes *these* relations also: and at the very time, too, when all the enormities perpetrated by the *superiors* in the relation were authorized *by law*. Yet, what *christian*, allowing even that there were no restraints of municipal laws—would, at this day, justify or palliate the unprovoked dismission of a wife, or unfeeling and dishonorable treatment of her, on the part of a husband professing christianity, on the plea, that as Paul had recognized the *relation* as it *then* was, every thing that was *then* practised under it was allowable *now*? Or who is there, that, on the same principle, would justify a christian parent for selling his child into slavery, or for taking away his life on any provocation?—or a christian creditor who would insist upon his rights, '*de debitore in partes secundo*,' in reference to his insolvent debtor? No one: because christianity, although recognizing these, and whatever other *relations* may be necessary for the real welfare of society, has cleared them from every foreign and hurtful ingredient; she has lopped off from them every thing that is offensive to her own purity, and injurious to their most healthful and salutary exercise. Whilst she exacts from the *wife*, *subjection*, she has secured her from all degradation by requiring the *husband* to *honor* his wife. Whilst children are taught obedience to parents in all things not inconsistent with their higher duties to God, they are protected from injury and outrage by the requisition upon the parents to rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to lead lives of piety themselves. And the creditor, in one of the beautiful parables of the Savior, is exhorted by the highest motive that can affect man, *his own happiness*, to be merciful to the unfortunate and ruined debtor. The consequence has been, and always will be, that in societies where the duties of these relations have been performed in accordance with these directions of *wisdom*, there has been more of domestic happiness and spiritual comfort, as well as of social order, and of intellectual and moral and political power. Let slavery as it exists among us be tested by the same rules that have been applied so successfully for their melioration to the relations above mentioned; let it undergo the same christian purgation that *they* have, and what will remain of it? Nothing but the *master who pays* and the *servant who receives* what is just and equal, (a fair equivalent) for his services. *This* is

the *relation* which the apostles establish, because there is nothing in it incompatible with the gospel, and it tears up slavery by the roots.

Thus much for some of the chief grounds which it is supposed the Bible furnishes for the continuance of slavery. You will see I have thought *hints* would be sufficient, and that I have not carried out the arguments to the extent of which they are susceptible. This I leave for you; knowing how capable you are of doing it, from your intimate acquaintance with the scriptures, your habits of intellectual exercise, and your desire to know the *truth* that you may do your duty.

But is there not among us a large number, who, advancing a step further than those who equip themselves in the armor of the gospel, acknowledge that 'slavery is criminal' in the sight of God; that it cannot be palliated; that it is *injustice*, *theft*, *robbery*; that it gives rise to atrocities which even to think of make the cheeks burn; yet, insist that '*how* and *when*' it shall cease, are questions by no means clear of difficulty? Against such doctrine as this, so replete with fallacy and tending to bring upon the cause of truth a reproach that it does not merit, and an injury whose extent cannot be foreseen, I wish to enter my protest. It certainly requires no common boldness to take the position before an enlightened community, that an acknowledged sin—one proved to be such, too, by God's *word* and *providence*, should not be repented of and forsaken *at once*. With what face would any of you who are ministers, after proving to your congregations that *injustice*, *violence*, *oppression*, were sins in the sight of God, and that He had denounced a '*wo unto him that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work*,' tell them 'how and when' these sins were to be repented of was a matter not clear of difficulty? If *white* men were the sufferers from the perpetration of such sins, all would declare that the questions were clear of doubt. And is it true that when committed against the negro slave, God looks upon them as less criminal, and authorizes a different measure to be meted out, and a reasoning *sui generis* to be applied? Would you not rather tell them, as the Savior and all his true ministers since have done, '*repent*'—not to-morrow, or next day, but *now*; and by restoring *at once* what has been withheld by injustice and fraud and force, do works that consist with repentance and prove its sincerity? You would not, surely, at this time of day, in the present state of mental philosopy and religious science in the presbyterian church, tell your congregations that they have been committing sin for a long time, are doing so now, and yet say to them, all you ask as the ambassador of God, is, that they *prepare* to repent, that is, that they prepare to leave it off some ten, fifteen, or twenty years hence; or if any of them should in the meantime be hurried to their dread account, their children or posterity will do it for them. You would not declare to them, all your *master* required was, that they should come to a full *conviction* of the sin *now*, but that from fear of loss, of the world, of the charge of fanaticism, of disparagement in fash-

ionable estimation, of personal convenience, or of giving any shock to the structure of society, they might practise it until God in his own good time should remove the matter out of the way. This I am confident you would not do; and yet, is not this the very doctrine that is preached when slavery is acknowlededg to be *sin*, but that it is to cease at some *future time?*

But this has been found too bold for any but the most determined slaveholder. It has therefore been much modified in its *dress* by saying, 'there are no specific commands in the Bible on the subject of slavery, resembling those on adultery, theft, &c. that it is abolished in the Bible under the general commands, *do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you*, &c. and in fulfilling these commands it is our duty to take into consideration the *probable consequences* of our conduct.' And has it come to this, in the presbyterian church, that a duty which is clearly ascertained to fall under the general command above quoted, may be postponed *on that account;* and that its performance is less imperative than the performance of such as are specified; and that a man who, at one fell swoop, has robbed another of *all* his rights as a fellow-being, and put him into the road to *death*, is not bound to as expeditious restitution as he who has stolen from his rich neighbor a six-pence!—that, in the *first* case, the aggressor may take time to consider the *probable consequences* to his own estate, his name and standing in society, and more than this, whether restitution of *all* his rights will not be injurious to the *sufferer*, and whether it would not be better for him, as he is *accustomed* to it, to remain crushed and trodden down, and that his *posterity* come into the enjoyment of the rights that have been wrested from *him*, whilst in the *latter* he is bound to immediate restitution? I will venture to say, if these be the prevailing homiletics of our church, the sooner she loses her name and individuality and influence, the better for the country and the world.

I will now proceed to examine, very briefly, some of the parts of that alchemy by which the leopard has been made to change his spots, the contrivances of men to put aside the claims of God, and sin to become no longer sin.* I shall consider the objection

* It is an inquiry not devoid of interest, though by no means very flattering to human pride, to trace how readily, arguments for slaveholding *accommodate* themselves to *circumstances*. At first, men are to be enslaved for the good of their souls; when any attempt is made for their moral and intellectual elevation, the slaveholder insists that it has no other tendency than to make the slaves unhappy and himself insecure. When from the increasing light of christianity its professors become ashamed any longer to persist in the plea of brutifying their fellow-men, that they might hold them as slaves; and some stir is made by the friends of liberty and the country towards emancipation, the christian slaveholder cries out, 'not yet! not yet! for the world, not yet! it will be the ruin of the *slaves* if they are set free *now;* the *present* generation are very ignorant, totally unqualified for freedom, the *next* will be prepared, and then, what every body so much desires can be done advantageously and profitably for all concerned.' This puts the whole affair to rest again. All becomes calm and tranquil. The present generation of slaves go to their *audit*, the masters *die and are buried*. The *next* generation that was to exhibit *full*

1. *That slaves are not qualified for freedom.* Wherever I go among the slaveholders of our church, this excuse is rife; and it has been made so long and so loud, as to be thought fairly conclusive of the whole matter. It is very much of the same nature with the objection that was made to catholic emancipation in Ireland, by the ecclesiastical and civil aristocracy of Great Britain. What answer would such objectors have made to the *corps* of opponents to one of the most magnanimous acts of the British government, when it was alleged that all the institutions of the country would be broken up, and even religion itself could not be maintained under the malignant influence of catholic emancipation; that the vice and ignorance of the catholics (continued at least, if not in some measure produced, by protestant persecutors) would break down every salutary barrier; and that they were only qualified for living under the restraints in which they had been reared? Or to the autocrat of the Russias who should plead in justification of his recent carnage of the Poles, that this portion of his subjects are totally unqualified for any other government than the one which is crushing them into the dust; that the tyranny which he exercises over them is not of his own enactment, but that it has been *entailed* upon him; and that although desiring all good to this portion of his unfortunate subjects, he is still under the necessity of keeping up the old system of oppression to which they have become *accustomed:* but, that, in having it imposed upon him by his ancestors, and being thus, as it were, *compelled* to maintain it, he is the most unfortunate of men, deserving commiseration instead of blame? Would such reasons as these be received with any portion of tolerance?—Would they not be considered as founded in the most profound ignorance of the constitution of the human mind, or to be the shallow excuses of the rankest hypocrisy?

God has formed all men for freedom, just as surely as he has fitted them, in their physical conformation, for the pure air of the ambient heavens. Freedom is man's appropriate element; that in which he acts best, and in which he shows most of mental and moral life: All others are unnatural, unhealthy, and tend to produce *death*, the death of the whole *being;* and they are the devices of 'man's inhumanity to man.' That the first part of this proposition is true we may easily satisfy ourselves; for when we are deprived of liberty, *nature* is ever trying to regain it; she finds nothing that can be received in exchange for it; and just as unerringly desires to escape from chains as she does to withdraw from the foul and pestilential atmosphere of a charnel-house. Do we not, then, say to God, when in his word and through his judgments, he thunders

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preparation for liberty, comes on the scene, with a new generation of masters. When the latter are reminded of the promises of their progenitors, they vociferate the cry they have inherited with their slaves, 'not yet! not yet! by no means *this* generation; they will ruin themselves; the *next* we know will be prepared fully,' &c. &c. So it will go on to the last syllable of recorded time, or till 'not yet!' be drowned in the crashing thunders of heaven's judgments.

in our ears, 'let this people go that they may serve me,' '*they can serve thee better as slaves than in the condition for which thou didst form them.*' Again: what has disqualified the slave for freedom—his *natural* state? The *chains* that we have cast upon him. Is it a reasonable course, then, to prolong a condition all whose results, down to the present moment, have been *disqualification* for freedom, with the expectation that it will yet, after the failure of our experiment for two hundred years, bring forth fruits that consist with freedom? Shall we be careful daily to make the chains more secure, and hypocritically tempt God with our prayers that he may remove them? If this excuse be a good one *now*, and slavery be continued, producing no other fruits than such as it has already yielded; it will be good *next year*, next lustrum, next century; and slavery, with all its horrors, is made perpetual. Are you willing to say *Amen?* But it is said in avoidance, that *although the present adults are, and must continue through the remainder of their lives, unqualified for freedom, and therefore should remain in slavery; we can qualify their* CHILDREN *for freedom by bestowing upon them a suitable education, and rearing them under the influence of the hopes and expectations of freemen.* This enticing humanity was proclaimed by the slaveholders of Kentucky thirty years ago, to my knowledge; how long *before* I know not.—How carefully this pledge has been redeemed, is proved by the fact that the generation which was then commencing and that was to be *qualified* for freedom, have grown up, and are the very persons upon whose vice and ignorance and disqualification at this time, the excuse for continuing slavery is founded. But we will pass this by, and examine with what fidelity *we* are redeeming our pledge of preparing their successors, the present youthful generation, for freedom. A few of our people buy primers, spelling-books, and testaments, for them; and on Sunday morning or afternoon they are instructed for an hour or two by the children or the junior members of the white family, in the elements of *reading*. In a few of the towns and villages, sabbath-schools for the blacks are established, in which they receive instruction for an hour, or an hour and a half. This comprises all or nearly all the means that are in operation to prepare the rising generation of blacks for freedom. There are *day schools* for the free colored people, one at Louisville and another at Lexington; if any slaves are sent to them for education, I am uninformed of the fact. Now, I ask you, if you believe that there are, out of the whole number of colored people in this state, (amounting to probably, 200,000,) 5000 who are receiving elementary instruction in *reading* from private efforts and the sabbath-schools *together*? Are there, in your opinion, *half* that number who can read the bible understandingly and with ease? Are there *one thousand* who in addition to facility in reading *English*, can write a hand sufficiently legible for the transaction of the plainest business? Are there *one hundred* who add to reading and writing, as above, a competent knowledge of arithmetic, as far as the *rule of three*? I suppose these questions must all be answered in the negative. I know not *one*, either per-

sonally or from information, who can *read, write,* and *cypher.* I do not pretend to precision of knowledge on this point; and if I am in error, I shall gladly receive correction from those who have more accurate information. The conclusion to which my mind has been brought on the subject of *preparation,* is corroborated by this fact, *that there is not, so far as my knowledge extends after careful inquiry, even among its most strenuous advocates, any regular deduction made from the time of field-labor or domestic service of their slaves, to bestow upon them this preparation.* Now, brethren, judging from the experience of the *past,* and our knowledge of the *present,* of what weight is the excuse for continuing slavery, based upon '*preparation?*' Is it saying more than the naked facts will warrant, that its advocates, whatever they may *intend, act* for the perpetuation of slavery? If so, are you willing to unite in such action, or to continue it for another day?

2. *But we are willing to give up our slaves, if every body else will; or if they all can be removed from the country.* Whoever says this, subjects his sincerity to violent suspicion. The *condition* in each case, though not *physically,* is *morally* impossible; and it would not be more unreasonable to say, that you would give up your slaves if the sun would cease to shine. You are a *preacher,* pressing upon an impenitent friend the necessity of personal holiness; he replies, to all your earnestness, that he will submit to God in doing his will, if all his neighbors will go with him. What now would you think of his head, or his heart, or his manners? As to removing the slaves from Kentucky, sit down and make the calculation of their present numbers, probably 200,000; their yearly increase, say 5000: consider what *has been* done towards removing them for the last six or seven years, during which period the *theory* of colonization has been favorably cherished by our countrymen; that there have been removed only about 150, nearly if not quite half of whom died on the passage to Africa, and in the seasoning of her deadly climate: calculate the cost of removal and of six or twelve months maintenance of 5000 annually, after their arrival on the shores of that continent: calmly contemplate the nature of the public mind which it is indispensable should be brought up to a full approval of the scheme: and after doing all this, if you still think the plan of *removal* is the most practicable one for the extinguishment of slavery, or that it is *practicable at all* for this purpose, I have not another word to address to you on this subject. The mind that could be led to such a conviction, after duly considering the facts, is too far gone in love with a darling scheme to be reasoned with.

3. *But we fear amalgamation*—or in other words, that there will be intermarriages between the whites and the colored people. Although I look upon this objection as unsuitable altogether to a manly mind that has been careful to enlighten itself on *this subject,* and impartially to reach its conclusions upon *all*—and upon amalgamation as having no natural connection whatever with the concession to our slaves of their rights *as men,* yet, believing that it weighs somewhat with honest minds which have not taken enlarged views

of the consequences of emancipation: and that it is frequently used with no despicable effect by the opponents of all efforts in favor of freedom; I shall not, as I had at first intended, pass it by entirely unnoticed. I have said that amalgamation has no natural connection with emancipation: neither has it, any more than the assumption by the emancipated of any other of the powers belonging to our civil or social relations. Who fears the blacks will, if emancipated, become our school-masters, our college-professors, our preachers, our lawyers, or our physicians? No one. Why? Simply because they would, on account of their ignorance and total want of literary or scientific qualification, be totally incompetent; therefore, there would be, on *their* part, no aspiration to the offices, and on *ours* there would, very justly and very certainly, be *exclusion* from them, if they should aspire whilst deficient in merit. Now, from the superior tenderness and delicacy of the marriage relation, and from the greater care we exercise lest our friends and connexions enter into it unworthily, I entertain the opinion that alliances of this kind would be far less successfully sought by the colored people, than the public stations awhile ago mentioned. Many of us would be well contented with persons as school-masters, preachers, lawyers, or physicians, with whom we would have insurmountable objections, (leaving out of view personal likings or dislikings,) to contract the marriage relation. Now, when to ignorance, degradation of *caste*, and a great deficiency of those qualifications, intellectual, moral and pecuniary, which secure social equality, is added that *physical repugnance* on the part of the whites, so earnestly alleged; it seems to me that a stronger barrier of defence in the premises could not be erected. If you and every one else fear and repel amalgamation, you and they will be safe from its danger: for we may rest very secure in the belief, at least so long as there is an equality of sexes among the colored people, that Sabine violence attempted against us by a concerted movement of the black ladies and gentlemen, will not be the world's gossip during the present century. It is very certain, that so strong would be the prejudice against amalgamation by the present generation of adults, and probably for several to come, that even the valor of a Sesostris or the charms of a Cleopatra could not overcome it. And it does appear to my poor judgment scarcely a sufficient reason for continuing a great trespass against our fellow-men, because some hundred years hence, a prince-royal of Jamaica, or the duke of Barbadoes, the countess of Porto-Rico, or one of the royal maids of Cuba, dressed 'in the livery of the burnished sun,' may overcome it in the person of one of our great-great-great-grand children. It is difficult to treat such an objection with the seriousness becoming the subject. Being nothing of a match-maker myself, and knowing no one in all the circle of my acquaintance who is in the least peril on this ground, I have not considered it as possessing the least solidity.

4. *But if we set our slaves free among us, they will turn round and cut our throats.* This would be bad enough, truly: but do you enter-

tain any serious apprehension of such a result? For if you do, I shall be compelled to attribute it either to conscious guilt for bad treatment of your slaves, or to a total want of manhood. We have succeeded, thus far, in keeping in subjection these people, whilst committing against them the greatest trespass that man can commit against his fellow, whilst withholding from them rights for which men in all ages have hazarded life, fortune, and honor; and yet, when we restore those rights *peaceably* and *kindly*, it is most stoutly maintained, that they to whom they are restored, will turn and rend us. This is surely unsound philosophy—altogether at variance with the laws of mind, as well as with historical facts: for I am very sure that those who insist upon the objection may safely be challenged to produce a single well-authenticated instance to show, that dangerous or even inconvenient consequences have followed the sudden emancipation of large bodies of slaves. Now, I am by no means so sanguine as to indulge the belief, that in emancipation will be found a *panacea* for all the ills that flesh is heir to; but that they will ultimately be immeasurably diminished by it I cannot for one moment doubt. And I wish it always borne in mind whilst we are discussing that part of the subject which relates to the expediency of emancipation, that it is not the introduction of a new and untried evil, where none of kindred character existed *previously*; but that it is the substitution of an evil, in the opinion of its advocates, light and transient when compared with the evil of slavery, whose ultimate *tendency*, in the judgment of all considerate men, who have weighed it, is to *crush us*.

Now, to every one of you who is a slaveholder, and in whose mind exists an apprehension of the danger predicated in the objection, I am bold to offer some means of defence from all harm. Say, you have become convinced that slavery, as it exists among us, is a *sin* before God; that you have repented of your own guilt in this matter, and are now anxious to show fruits that consist with repentance: you summon before you your servants—the fathers and mothers, and such others of them as may be old enough to understand an explanation of the principles upon which you are about to act; you say to them, you have become convinced that the bonds in which you have held them are inconsistent with the *law of love to our neighbor*, enjoined by God upon every man; and that moved by the sacred authority of the religion you profess, you have determined to continue the sin no longer. With this, you read and then deliver to them, accurately authenticated deeds of manumission for themselves and their children. You further say to them, 'as I have already given to you the most convincing proof I can furnish of my friendship, it is not my intention to push you out of my doors, desiring never to see you again—exposed to the impositions of a world with whose business you are in a great measure unacquainted, or to the prejudice and scorn of such as cherish for you no kind of sympathy: no; if you choose to remain in my employment, I will pay you what is just and equal, a fair equivalent for your services. I will continue to feel for you the love, and ex-

tend to you the conduct of a christian; I will assist you in providing the means of educating your children for usefulness in life, and should you so choose, in binding them out to profitable trades and employments; and I will be your sure and steadfast friend, and your protector so long as your conduct shall not render it improper for me to be so.' I ask you, now, if after doing this, and kneeling down with them at the footstool of God's throne to thank him for the christian courage he has bestowed upon you, and to implore his blessing upon the down-trodden and the poor, in their new estate, you would fear the flames of the incendiary, or the knife of the assassin? Hateful as is to many the very name of *abolition*, here it is in its essence—and its safety is sure, because it is the offspring and the exhibition of benevolence.

Well, after all this, you say, 'what can *we* do?' I answer, you can rise up to-morrow and liberate all whom you hold in bondage. 'But,' you reply, 'what effect would this have upon the great body of slaveholders in the State?' I will undertake to affirm, that by such a course, small as is your number, you will have crucified the giant-sin of our land; his dying struggles may be fierce and long protracted, but his dissolution will be certain, because the death-blow will have been given. The ministers and rulers of any of the larger denominations of christians have it in their power *to-morrow* to give the fatal wound to slavery in Kentucky—and if in Kentucky, throughout the slaveholding region of the union—for how would the congregations over which God has placed them, and upon whom they would then be authorized to press this subject with all its overpowering weight upon sound consciences and christian hearts, stand in the blaze of such virtuous action, and not be consumed or won by it? If it were to prevail among presbyterians alone, how long could the other denominations hold their fellow-men in bondage? *Not twelve months*, as I honestly believe. If then you will come up to the next synod, after having 'loosed the bands of wickedness, undone the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, and broken every yoke,' so far as you are concerned, you have the promise of the Lord that 'thy light shall break forth as the morning, and thy health spring forth speedily; that thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord be thy re-reward.' You may, it is true, be called *madmen;* but Paul was so called before you. You may be called fanatics, fools, and knaves; but Sharp, Clarkson, and Wilberforce, were so baptized by the enemies of humanity: you may, at first, obtain but little honor from men; but you will win an eternal weight of glory from God. That you may be influenced by Him so to act, is the earnest desire of your friend and brother,

JAMES G. BIRNEY.

Mercer County, September 2d, 1834.

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